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Borrowed Scripts: Democratization and Military Mutinies in West and Central Africa

Maggie Dwyer, PhD

University of Edinburgh, Centre for African Studies

dwyer.maggie@gmail.com

Borrowed Scripts: Democratization and Military Mutinies in West and Central Africa

Abstract

This article identifies a spike in mutinies in West and Central Africa during the 1990s and examines this increased number of revolts in relation to the economic and political climate of the time. Using interviews with former mutineers as well as analysis of their public statements during the revolts, the research demonstrates that the soldiers were often inspired by the messages and ideas spread through the civilian democratization movements at the time. It challenges the idea that African rank and file soldiers were immune to the political climate and instead argues that they borrowed a script from the civilian movement during mutinies. The article will also look beyond the 1990s and examine why mutinies in West and Central Africa may be most common in countries that display respect for civil liberties and political freedoms. The analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the junior ranks of the military and civilian society.

Key words: military, mutiny, indiscipline, democracy, civil-military relations

Introduction

While academic literature has given considerable attention to coups d'état, mutinies have gone largely unexamined within the study of African militaries. Although mutiny is considered 'one of the constants in the history of military organizations,'ⁱ the limited research on mutinies in Africa consists primarily of individual case studies, mostly of incidents following closely after independence. There have been no longitudinal studies to help indicate when mutinies most often occur nor are there attempts to situate the choice to mutiny within the wider political context, in the way that coup studies often do.

The research for this article counters that trend with an examination of mutinies between 1960 and 2012 in West and Central Africa.ⁱⁱ This study reveals a significant spike

in the occurrence of mutinies in the region during the 1990s. This article explains the unequal distribution by linking the increase in mutinies in the 1990s to the political and economic climate of the time. The spike corresponded with what is often referred to as the democratization period in Africa. It was a time of both turbulence and hope with quick collapses of authoritarian regimes, increases in competitive elections, and more political rights for the average citizen. However, debates continue about whether the political reforms seen during the 1990s were successful and lasting.ⁱⁱⁱ

Militaries in African states in the 1990s are often viewed to have been a barrier to the democratic reforms that were demanded by citizens across the continent. For example, Eboe Hutchful argues that the democracy movement ‘won the battle for civil society but lost the battle for the military.’^{iv} He laments the ‘failure of the democracy movement to ‘capture’ key sectors of the military.’^v I agree with Hutchful that militaries in Africa were generally not active participants in progressing democratic change; however I will argue that in many ways they were ‘captured’ by the themes of the movement. Their rhetoric and demands often appeared to be borrowing a script from civilian groups advocating for greater democratic rights. As the below sections will demonstrate, soldiers began to incorporate language of human right and civil liberties into their public expressions of dissatisfaction. Just as civil society ‘rediscovered their popular voice’^{vi}, so did the military, although the junior soldiers often expressed theirs through mutinies.

While the paper centres on mutinies, the findings move beyond military indiscipline to examine the way soldiers appropriated popular political themes. The use of political rhetoric by mutineers in the 1990s, as examined in this article, has some similarities to the ways militaries in the 1970s and 1980s often embraced socialist and Marxist themes.^{vii} The political language used by these military regimes has been criticized as a “convenient ideological gloss”^{viii} and similar patterns will be discussed in regards to mutineers’ adaptation of democratic rhetoric. Unlike coup leaders who want to project themselves as political leaders different from their predecessors, mutineers’ use of political language is unexpected. They are generally not instigating political change but rather utilizing popular political themes to discuss their own conditions within the military.

Following an explanation of methodology, the article will demonstrate how increased soldier dissatisfaction in the 1990s can be partially attributed to international economic factors at the time. It will also illustrate how the end of the Cold War affected

soldiers' conditions as well as their willingness to make demands to the government. Next, an examination of the rhetoric and demands made by mutineers will show that they often adopted messages and ideas spread through the civilian democratization movements. While this article will focus mostly on the 1990s, its lessons are not restricted to this time period. The last section will look beyond the 1990s and examine why mutinies in West and Central Africa may be most common in countries that display respect for civil liberties and political freedoms.

Identifying Mutinies

Data for this article is drawn from a wider study on mutinies in Africa.^{ix} Using a range of sources, including a systematic review of *Africa South of the Sahara*, *Africa Confidential*, *Africa Research Bulletin*, and *West Africa*, I identified incidents of mutiny in West and Central Africa from 1960-2012. Additional information about mutinies came from academic writing, memoirs, other news outlets, and declassified and leaked intelligence reports. In reviewing these sources I was looking for events which included the following traits: 1) a group of soldiers who remain within the state's military structure and 2) use mass insubordination to express stated grievances and goals beyond the desire for political power to higher political and military authorities. This is an intentionally conservative definition of mutinies, which excludes other types of military indiscipline such as desertion or coups.

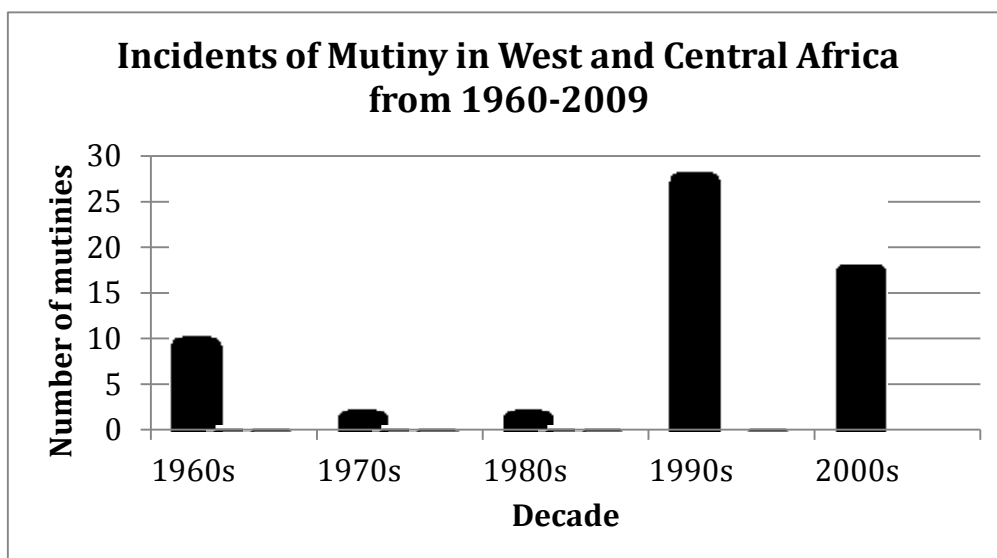
Differentiating between coups and mutinies is not always straightforward as in practice they sometimes may overlap.^x The research found that it was rare for a mutiny to directly escalate into a successful coup but separate incidents of mutiny at times precede coups. There are also cases in which an event is considered as both a mutiny and a failed coup attempt depending on the source.^{xi} While the same events can be interpreted as having different motivations (and even members of the same unit can have different goals), it is also significant to note that the vast majority of the events in the mutiny chart below have not been recorded in coup datasets.

The study also involved field research in Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, and The Gambia in which former mutineers, military leadership, politicians, civil society leaders,

and journalists were interviewed in regards to incidents of mutiny.^{xii} This allowed for unique insight into the perspective of the individuals who conducted or experienced the mutinies first-hand. Through this combination of primary and secondary research I identified sixty-six incidents of mutiny. Analysis of these cases showed that mutineers in this region are primarily rank and file soldiers and they generally use the mutiny to express both material grievances as well as a sense of injustice concerning their treatment by higher authorities.

Figure 1 below chronologically charts the incidents of mutiny and visually demonstrates the dramatic increase in the 1990s. This spike in mutinies poses an interesting question of why there would be such a large increase in revolts during this decade. It is possible that there was under-reporting of mutinies during the 1970s and 1980s due to a deficit of press freedoms in many states at the time. However, the below analysis will demonstrate that there are numerous reasons for both the lack of mutinies in the earlier decades and prevalence of mutinies in the 1990s, which go beyond methodological explanations.

Figure 1^{xiii}



Global Trends Lead to Ground Level Complaints

The grievances of soldiers in the 1990s are part of a wider economic crisis, which had its roots in the financially difficult times in the previous decades. By the beginning of the 1980s ‘virtually every African country was manifesting signs of acute economic distress, reflected in a mounting and unsustainable debt burden, a permanent trade deficit and an acute fiscal crisis which meant that the state was unable to maintain basic infrastructure or fund essential social services.’^{xiv} International financial institutions and Western governments deemed that uncontrolled state expenditures were a primary cause of the economic crisis across the continent and African states were pressured to accept Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). SAPs required states to pursue economic reforms as stipulated by international institutions in order to receive loans from them.^{xv} As part of these programs

donors attempted to impose a predetermined ceiling (or ‘acceptable level’) on the military expenditures of the states. These attempts were directed especially at those states deemed to be engaged in ‘excessive’ or ‘unproductive’ expenditures on the military at the expense of the social sector and economic development.^{xvi}

SAPs therefore threatened the interests of the military, which had grown substantially throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s.

Although there were various ways in which states attempted to manoeuvre around full implementation of the required changes, militaries saw significant decreases in size and expenditures by the 1990s.^{xvii} The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s (SIPRI) database of military expenditures from 1988 onwards shows a steady decline in military expenditures from the late 1980s through the late 1990s across sub-Saharan Africa. During this period defense spending was the highest in 1989 when total military expenditure was \$14.4 billion and reached its lowest in 1996 with \$9.5 billion.^{xviii} The figures also decreased when examined as a proportion of GDP (from 3.0 percent in 1990 to 2.6 percent in 1998) and as a proportion of central government spending (from 11.8 percent to 8.5 percent).^{xix} However, these reductions were disproportionate across sub-Saharan Africa with South Africa, Angola and Ethiopia accounting for the largest decreases in expenditures.^{xx} Analysis of specific countries within West and Central Africa using the SIPRI dataset shows variations between countries but the pattern of declining military spending from the late 1980s to late 1990s is still a general trend in many states. For example, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau each saw military spending nearly halved

between the late 1980s and late 1990s, while Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire also saw decreases in military spending between 20 and 35 percent. In relation to decreased defense funding, the number of military personnel was reduced from the 1980s into the 1990s. The size of sub-Saharan African militaries had quadrupled between 1963 and 1979 but then fell by a third by the mid 1990s.^{xxi}

In order to understand the increase in mutinies in the 1990s it is necessary to view how the decreased defense budgets presented above affected the average soldier. Military spending alone is not a definitive indicator of whether a military is content, especially at the lower levels, as military spending does not necessarily equate to better conditions for soldiers.^{xxii} However, we are not left guessing about how the economic conditions affected the daily lives of rank and file soldiers because they vocalized their discontent. By the mid 1990s soldiers in at least Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Guinea, Niger, Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone had all publicly claimed that they had not been paid their salaries or other monetary dues. Many soldiers also made complaints about decreased standards of living within the military. A lack of salary payments and concerns over standards of living were paralleled in the civil service in many countries during this time period.^{xxiii}

Decreases in internal military spending is only one factor that contributed to declining military satisfaction in Africa in the late 1980s and into the 1990s; another important factor was changes to Cold War relationships. Throughout the Cold War the international superpowers vied for African state loyalty and offered military assistance as a key incentive. However by 1985 the Soviet Union began to disengage with Africa and the Western allies soon followed suit.^{xxiv} The end of the Cold War also brought an end to much of the foreign military assistance and other perks that the military had become accustomed to, such as foreign military training and donations of equipment.^{xxv} Although much of the expensive weapons provided by foreign powers during the Cold War were unnecessary for the type of conflicts most African countries endured, the downgrade likely symbolized a loss of prestige to many in the military.

With pressure to cut military spending and reduced assistance from abroad, equipment and maintenance in the late 1980s was neglected.^{xxvi} This neglect had significant consequences for West African troops in the 1990s when most members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent troops to Liberia and

Sierra Leone. There were several mutinies following involvement in these multinational missions in which the deployed troops cited a lack of proper equipment and training among their list of grievances.^{xxvii}

One may question why soldiers began to mutiny only in the 1990s if their conditions were decreasing by the mid to late 1980s. Scholars have raised similar questions about why the civilian democratization movement gained ground when it did.^{xxviii} Just as there is no singular reason to explain the civilian timing, there are also likely several reasons why soldiers were reluctant to mutiny in the 1980s. It could be the case that conditions were not quite bad enough in the 1980s to trigger a mutiny. Although defence spending had decreased in the late 1980s, widespread accusations of non-payment did not begin until the early 1990s. Additionally, there was little indication that the largely authoritarian leaders who ruled in the 1970s and 1980s would make concessions to mutineers, which could have served as a disincentive. The reduced likelihood of mutinies under authoritarian regimes extends beyond this time period and will be further examined in the final section.

It is also likely that the Cold War relationships that were strong in the 1970s and present, although weakening, in the 1980s served as a deterrent for mutinies. During the Cold War many African states relied on direct military support from their non-African allies. As Herbert Howe explains, the consistent willingness of foreign nations to intervene on the behalf of African leaders ‘undoubtedly dampened the aspirations of some potential insurgents or invaders.’^{xxix} It also likely caused potential mutineers to rethink plans to revolt. Junior soldiers would have been aware that they would stand no chance against an attack by better-equipped and trained foreign soldiers.

The end of the Cold War also reduced the willingness of non-African states to intervene in African conflicts. France, who had once been quick to deploy its paratroopers to assist its former colonies, ended many of its mutual defence agreements with African countries. For example, ‘the French government informed Félix Houphouët-Boigny, its key African ally, that he could not longer count on French military reinforcements to contain domestic unrest.’^{xxx} Interestingly, Houphouët-Boigny tested this threat during mutinies in the spring of 1990. France stood by its word and refused the request for military assistance in putting down the mutinies.^{xxxi} Subsequently, the president gave in to many of the mutineers’ demands.

While the higher likelihood of foreign intervention throughout the 1970s and 1980s may have been a deterrence of mutinies, the lack of foreign intervention in the 1990s likely had the opposite effect. Without the possibility of foreign assistance, leaders in the early 1990s were quick to acquiesce to soldiers' demands in order to avoid further instability, which was already growing with popular protests at the time.

Mutual Mobilization

In addition to economic trends and shifts in international relations, which led to more grievances among the military, the political mood of the time also likely played a part in the increased mutinies. The swift regime changes that took place in the 1990s, following decades of authoritarian leadership can be attributed to both international and domestic factors. External donors began to introduce political conditionality to aid allocations, which required recipient countries to demonstrate respect for human rights and progress towards democracy.^{xxxii} Under the deteriorating economic conditions most states had little choice but to concede, at least to some degree. While the political conditionality served as warnings for leaders who had grown accustomed to neglecting democratic principles and human rights, in practice it was often selectively enforced.^{xxxiii}

By the late 1980s the credibility of single-party systems was challenged not only internationally but also internally. The decreasing per capita income levels for the average African caused people to further question the existing authoritarian and military-led political systems. Shared economic hardships led to a 'coalescence of political participation by all levels of society from elite to mass level.'^{xxxiv} One of the main ways in which this coalescence transpired was through mass protests.^{xxxv}

The mass protests, which initially involved economic demands, widened to include political reforms.^{xxxvi} Chris Allen et. al. note that while the popular calls for 'good governance' were often undefined, the movement can generally 'be seen to include such elements as the rule of law, the safeguarding of basic human rights- including the right to organize, freedom of expression and freedom of the press- and the presence of honest and efficient government.'^{xxxvii} While mutineers in the 1990s did not directly demand government improvements in these same areas, examples in the following section will

show that issues such as rule of law, human rights, and freedom of expression were concerns also expressed in mutinies.

Additionally, during the 1990s there were ‘soundly based popular perceptions that those closely associated with government did not personally share the effects of economic decline and, through massive corruption of public office, actually prospered whilst the majority suffered.’^{xxxviii} Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes note a similar observation by stating, ‘Judging by the issues raised in the streets, people seemed to want accountability of leaders and to eliminate inequalities arising from official corruption.’^{xxxix} Similar to the complaints made by the civilian sector, mutineers also highlighted the large gap between wealth and lifestyle within a military context and attributed the large differences to corruption.^{xl} As later examples will show, mutineers also made demands for accountability for their leadership. Lastly, like the civilian sector, mutinying soldiers saw that one way to rectify the situation was to pressure change through a shared voice and both groups mobilized, although in a different fashion.

Both the civilian democratization movement and the military mutinies also represent the desire for a reconfiguration of power dynamics. This is consistent with Robert Dahl explanation of democratic theory which he states at a minimum involves ‘the processes by which ordinary citizens exert a relatively high degree of control over leaders.’^{xli} Although the civilian democratization movement was often unclear in its specific political goals, there was a general sense of empowerment which Bratton and Mates explain involved ‘citizens attaining a new measure of self-confidence and a wider scope of taking control of their own lives.’^{xlii} Mutinies can also be seen to represent a high degree of empowerment from the lower ranks and a desire for more control of their situations, neither of which are traits normally inherent in military hierarchies. The similarities in the themes of the democratization movement and the military mutinies should not be seen as a coincidence, but instead it is more likely that junior soldiers gained inspiration and ideas from the movement.

Several examples will help illustrate this overlap between themes in the democracy movement and mutinies in the 1990s. First is the case of Côte d’Ivoire in which the economic crisis of the 1980s created particular problems for President Houphouët-Boigny.^{xliii} ‘The government had long paid farmers a higher proportion of the world price of the country’s agricultural commodities, especially coffee and cocoa, than had most

African governments.^{xliv} When world prices for coffee and cocoa dropped and the international donor community demanded austerity measures, President Houphouët-Boigny decreased subsidies, imposed new taxes, and eliminated many government jobs. However, the economic crisis did not stop lavish state expenditures.^{xlv} In February of 1990 the government announced a general cut of public wages by up to 40 percent and an 11 percent rise in income taxes.^{xlvi} This caused a massive public reaction and students, utility workers, educational and professional associations, taxi-drivers, hospital staff, and factory workers orchestrated strikes and street protests throughout the following months calling for both economic and political reforms.^{xlvii}

In May of 1990 it was the military's turn to express their discontent. On May 14, around one hundred rank and file soldiers attempted to take over the state-run radio station and demanded to meet with the president. The president promised the mutineers increased salaries, better living conditions, and reenlistment.^{xlviii} His willingness to quickly give in to the soldiers' demands was likely due to an increased dependency on the military in the face of a growing civilian movement. As previously mentioned, Houphouët-Boigny requested French military assistance but was denied the help. Air force members took note of the army success and two days after the army mutiny they staged their own revolt using more severe tactics. The fifty air force members armed with semi-automatic weapons seized the control tower and a terminal building of Abidjan International Airport. Similar to the army recruits, they were angry over low pay and poor living conditions. However, they also added grievances over corruption amongst the officer corps, claiming that their superiors docked their pay on a regular basis for little reason.^{xlix} When the government agreed to meet with the airmen to discuss their complaints the mutineers initially refused because one of the mediators was the Defence Minister. The mutineers called him a 'corrupt billionaire' and demanded his removal from the negotiation process.¹

The mutineers in Côte d'Ivoire were likely inspired by the actions of local civilian protestors who had been expressing their discontent for months prior to the mutiny. The civilian and military personnel shared both economic grievances and the idea that corruption or general government economic mismanagement was a cause of their hardship.

The Gambia provides another good example of the overlap between political themes in the civilian realm and mutinies. In the early 1990s The Gambia shared the burden of economic crisis seen throughout the continent, and dissatisfaction was expressed

through growing public protests. President Jawara was considered an advocate of human and civil rights and often applauded for the country's record of free and fair elections.^{li} However, by the 1990s the Gambian press became increasingly critical of his nearly thirty years in office. Newspapers ran numerous stories accusing the government of inaction. For example, frequent news articles were published questioning why The Gambia still had no university. Public awareness and resentment over corruption in The Gambia was undoubtedly at an all time high by the early 1990s due to several ongoing corruption scandals.^{lii}

The frustrations with regards to inaction and corruption among political leadership seen in the civilian sector were also mirrored in the military. Gambian soldiers returning from the ECOMOG mission to Liberia in 1991 and 1992 took to the streets when they did not receive their due pay. The soldiers accused their officers of being behind the late payment and specifically called for the removal of the highest-ranking officer in the country, Colonel Ndow Njie. These grievances supports Dr Abdoulaye Saine's assessment that "the motivation to mutiny ran deeper than just pay...there was widespread disapproval with the regime, in part due to increased corruption."^{liii} For the 60 junior soldiers in the 1991 mutiny it was not enough to just receive their salary arrears, they also wanted someone to be held accountable for the delay. The mutineers took their complaints directly to President Jawara at State House who met with the junior soldiers and conceded to their demands.

The cases of the Ivoirian mutiny in 1990 and the Gambian mutiny in 1991 show a remarkable reconfiguration of power. In both incidents the mutineers were rank and file soldiers and were able to engage directly with the Head of State. In many states in previous decades it would have been inconceivable that junior ranks would take their issues directly to the president and even more shocking that the president would 'obey' these junior ranks. However, leading into the 1990s there were increasing expectations that governments would be responsive. Growing domestic opposition and changes to foreign relationships also put political leadership in a more vulnerable position and one in which they were more likely to grant concessions to the military. The power shift can also be seen in the way that both groups of mutineers made accusations against the top individual in the military structure. They show the belief that even an individual in a high position should not be above the standard regulations, signalling a major shift from

previous decades when ‘big men’ were clearly above the law. It is significant to note that the mutinies in Côte d’Ivoire in 1990 and The Gambia in 1991 were the first time either country had experienced a mutiny. Therefore, it is unlikely that these soldiers had ‘learned’ to mutiny from other soldiers in their proximity but more likely that they picked up on common ideas expressed in the civilian sector, which in both cases had publicly protested just prior to the mutinies.

Familiar Rhetoric

It was not only the general concepts that overlapped between the democratization movement and mutinies; there were also similarities in the rhetoric used by mutineers and civilians. Mutineers appeared aware of the popular demand for multi-party elections and were cautious to not appear to be threatening the democratic process. They often seemed to want to distance themselves (at least in public statements) from military regimes and coup makers, who had lost popularity by the 1990s. For example, the spokesman for mutineers in Guinea Bissau in 1998 stated ‘We have already had the opportunity of stating on several occasions that we are soldiers, we do not want to become involved in politics... We do not claim the right to propose someone to be president of the Republic.’^{liv} Similarly, soldiers in Central African Republic in 1996 said that their mutiny was ‘corporatist’ and ‘apolitical’. Their spokesman explained to *Radio France International* ‘We have no intention of destabilizing the regime; President Patassé was democratically elected.’^{lv}

Aspects of the rhetoric used in the democratization movement such as justice and human rights also appeared within mutineer demands during the 1990s. For example, the spokesman for the 1996 Central African Republic mutiny stated, ‘We appeal to Amnesty International, and we agree to stop [the mutiny] this Friday evening.’^{lvi} In this case the soldiers attempted to gain sympathy from a prominent international organization by implying that their salary delay was a human rights violation. While Amnesty International did not take on their cause, the soldiers’ call for their assistance showed an awareness of the growing international dialogue surrounding human rights and a creativity in how they could use the trend to their advantage.

In 1997 mutineers in Central African Republic included in their demands ‘an end to any hampering of collective and individual liberties, in particular body searches, arrests and house searches.’ This is an especially unusual request from soldiers as ‘individual liberties’ are to some degree forfeited when soldiers join the military. In particular, living spaces are often subject to inspection within a military context. These demands, which are somewhat contradictory to military procedures, reflect the growing attention towards civil liberties at the time. The comments also hint at the objection to arbitrary arrests and demonstrate ideas of the importance of following due legal processes.

Mutineers in Guinea Bissau in 1998 also addressed issues of rule of law. The spokesman for the mutiny commented about an ongoing arms trafficking scandal in which military members were accused of trafficking weapons to Casamance rebels by stating

We want those who stand accused in the report to be brought to trial. Even if Brigadier Ansumane Mane himself is accused, he must be brought to justice. We are for justice because the law must take its course. The law is above everything else, everyone, whoever they may be, must obey the law.^{lvii}

The soldiers in this case sound very similar to calls heard around the continent for justice and accountability for all levels of society, regardless of the paradox of having mutineers explain the need for obedience to the law.

Despite their increased rhetoric about justice and calls for accountability, mutineers did not want those standards to apply to their own actions. Mutineers in the 1990s appeared nervous about their post-mutiny prospects. This makes sense considering the lack of mutinies in the 1970s and 1980s meant that soldiers had few precedents for how mutineers would be treated by the law. To rectify this uncertainty about their status following the revolt, mutineers began to add to their demands stipulations that they would not be held accountable for their actions when the mutiny ended. Soldiers in Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea all made deals with the government that gave them amnesty. Similarly, we should not assume that mutineers’ use of language regarding human rights and civil liberties actually translated into respect for human rights during this period. Instead, it seems as if much of the democratic language demonstrated an awareness of what were considered respectable and legitimate reasons to protest.

In addition to borrowing rhetoric from the democratization movement, in some cases mutineers also imitated the civilians through their tactics. For example, Gambian

soldiers in 1991 held a procession to State House while soldiers in Burkina Faso in 1997 marched to the Defence Ministry to make their complaints heard, both in very similar fashions to civilian protestors at the time. Mutineers in Burkina Faso in 1999 were reported to have chanted their demands, as is common during political protests.^{lviii} In this particular case soldiers would have had regular exposure to political protests because the mutiny occurred during a series of intense demonstrations against the Compaoré regime. Additionally, in the 1990s it was common for mutineers to assign a spokesperson for the group who would represent their cause to higher authorities and the media. This pattern is similar to political, student, and trade organizations that also regularly used spokespersons to articulate the goals of the group. The demands made by mutineers in the 1990s, the language that they use, and the actions taken during the revolt appeared to be a product of the time period and the dominance of similar rhetoric and actions in the civilian sector.

The Blurred Boundaries Between Junior Ranks and Civilians

The above examples and the general argument that mutineers were inspired by popular political themes of the time raises the question of why the soldiers did not join forces with the civilian movement. While it is possible that individual soldiers had involvement with civil society organizations advancing democratic ideas, my research did not find evidence of widespread relationships between mutineers and civilian organisations across the region. Given the earlier explanation of the military conditions in the 1980s and 1990s it would be fair to assume soldiers would be sympathetic towards the democratization movement. The military, especially its junior members, were suffering many of the same hardships as ordinary civilians and many of the calls for greater political liberties and respect for human rights would also benefit military members. However, instead the military often put down mass protests, with only a few notable exceptions such as Mali in 1991.

One explanation for why the military in most states did not become actively engaged in the democratization movement is that there had been a ‘virtual ‘privatization’ of key military units by incumbent dictators.’^{lix} These militaries or units were directly

loyal to the individual leaders. Bratton and Van de Walle expand on why this would be the case by stating

the armed forces often came to occupy a privileged position within the *ancien régime*. To keep the soldiers content and under some semblance of civilian control, rulers granted to individual officers and the military units a generous array of perks, privileges, and rewards, including access to rents and commercial ventures. Transitions from authoritarian rule threaten these benefits, not only because the greater transparency of a democratic regime may lead to pressures for the suspension of privileges, but also because the military must negotiate with a new and usually less sympathetic political elite.^{lx}

For the elite members of the military a switch to new, democratic leadership could have meant an end to a good deal and for the rest of the military the uncertainty of the role of the military under civilian democratic leadership appeared to make them reluctant to jump on board with the movement.

Hutchful argues that part of the blame for the reluctance of the military to join in must be placed on the democratization movement for failing to have a ‘clearly thought-out and articulated military policy.’^{lxi} He states ‘this strategy needed to separate the military *institution* clearly from the military *regime* and to avoid lumping the two together, as the democracy movement tended to do.’^{lxii} By ‘making wholesale attacks against the military’ those that may have been sympathetic to the movement were driven ‘into the arms of the regime.’^{lxiii} Although there were large elements of the military that were not satisfied under the authoritarian regimes of the 1970s and 1980s they also did not have trust or confidence that their lot would be improved with the movement towards democracy. Instead the junior soldiers seemed to instrumentalize many of the themes of the democratization movement for their own campaigns.

Popular input in political decision-making and expectations for accountable leadership are widely internationally accepted concepts within a civilian realm. However, these same concepts can be considered radical within a military context. Military hierarchies intentionally prohibit junior members from having a say in the decision making process. In the military, junior members are responsive to the orders of senior members; very rarely would the opposite pattern occur. For junior soldiers to demand that their seniors respond to their requests is what Elihu Rose calls ‘an unnatural and unsettling state for troops.’^{lxiv}

This raises questions as to why the popular civilian ideas, which are ‘unnatural’ in a military context would permeate the military sector. Militaries usually implement policies to separate its members from wider civilian society. For example, soldiers are typically housed on bases and required to wear uniforms and adhere to grooming standards which help unify the individuals but also separate them from civilians. In many militaries worldwide, the duties of a soldier would often not require day-to-day interaction with civilians. However in West and Central Africa militaries have often been utilized for domestic matters, which places soldiers in direct contact with civilians on a daily basis, through tasks such as manning road checkpoints. African militaries were often closely linked to the head of state and his/her protection and therefore militaries often have a heavy presence in urban areas, particular capital cities. Urban areas and capital cities were also the forefront of civilian political protests and many soldiers would have been exposed to their grievances and actions. Lastly, it is very common for junior soldiers to live off base due to military housing shortages, which would mean these soldiers spend a lot of their time with civilians.

It is not only the employment duties and lifestyles that likely exposed soldiers to themes of the democratization movement; the messages were spread through mediums in which soldiers would likely be exposed to. For example, religious organizations played an important counterweight to authoritarian regimes with ‘political sermons’ popular throughout the 1990s.^{lxv} Increases in shortwave radios, private radio stations, and private newspapers allowed civilians and military alike greater access to political messages than in previous decades and led to an easier transfer of information across state borders.^{lxvi} Sections of the youth, both student organizations and unemployed urban youth, also served as important instigators for political reform.^{lxvii}

While militaries often have a contentious relationship with urban youth, we also must view junior soldiers as part of the same peer group who likely maintain personal links with students or urban youth. Although military hierarchies often attempt to separate soldiers from the civilian population, the reality is that a large number of soldiers are youths, living in urban areas, listening to radios, and attending religious services in the same manner as much of the civilian population. It is therefore understandable that soldiers picked many of the popular sentiments regarding democracy that were expressed in the civilian population up.

Freedom to Mutiny

Just as the pressure for democratic reform did not end in the 1990s, neither did mutinies. While the economic situation and political climate of the 1990s may have created the perfect condition for mutinies, a look beyond mutinies in the 1990s suggests a wider pattern of links between mutinies and democratic political systems. An examination of the incidents of mutiny (documented in Figure 1) in relation to the Freedom House 'Freedom of the World' index score of the country at the time of the revolt revealed that seventy-two percent of the mutinies occurred in states that were ranked as either 'Free' or 'Partially Free.'^{lxviii} While there is room to critique the ability to categorize freedoms, specific country examples also indicate that mutinies generally occur more in countries exhibiting a higher degree of respect for political rights and civil liberties.

Just as there were few mutinies during the authoritarian regimes that dominated the continent in the 1970s and 1980s, there still remain few mutinies in the authoritarian regimes that exist in the region today. For example, states in West and Central Africa consistently considered 'Not Free' such as Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon have not experienced mutinies. The Gambia serves as a particularly interesting example of how authoritarian political systems may deter mutinies. The Gambia has had a unique political trajectory with a reverse pattern of most states in the region. During the 1980s when authoritarian regimes were common, The Gambia was one of the few considered to be democratic. Yet, as many states in the region have increased civil liberties and democratic political practices, The Gambia has done the opposite. It is currently one of the few countries in West Africa, which is labelled by Freedom House as 'Not Free' consistently over the last couple years. While The Gambia had a series of mutinies in the 1990s, as the government has become increasingly repressive mutinies have ceased. Nearly everyone I interviewed about the potential for a near future mutiny in The Gambia felt that it was very unlikely, as President Jammeh would see a mutiny as a direct threat and the soldiers would be severely disciplined. They felt that a mutiny would not be worth the risk as there would be no chance of government negotiations with mutinous soldiers.^{lxix} Recent political executions in 2012 (the first officially in twenty-seven years), which included military

members accused of plotting against Jammeh, served as a brutal warning for the consequences of threatening state stability.^{lxx}

The most recent mutinies on the continent also support the trend of mutinies occurring more often in states with democratic political systems. For example, mutinies took place in 2011 in Burkina Faso, which is ranked by Freedom House as ‘Partially Free,’ and in 2012 in Mali, which at the time was ranked as ‘Free.’ Sierra Leone has made considerable gains in political rights and civil liberties since the official end of its civil war and in 2013 was elevated to the category of ‘Free.’ The increased political freedoms have not necessarily erased soldiers’ grievances and some soldiers interviewed in 2011 and 2012 warned that a future mutiny may be on the horizon.^{lxxi} The interviewees explained how their confidence in the political and justice system increased their confidence in conducting a mutiny. For example, one soldier explained that he felt a mutiny would be successful under the current political leadership because ‘There are accessible leaders who want to know, who have an interest, who will listen. They (senior officers) will be arrested and they will be jailed.’^{lxxii} This individual believes the government will be responsive to their concerns, a significant shift from attitudes about the government in the 1990s. While the Gambian interviewees felt a mutiny was unlikely due to the unwillingness of the government to respond, the Sierra Leoneans saw mutiny as a way to communicate with higher authorities, which they felt would be open to discussing their grievances.

The pattern of mutinies occurring most often in states that have at least some respect for democratic principles is somewhat counterintuitive. It may seem logical that soldiers would revolt under a repressive system, however it is that system which would prohibit a successful mutiny. Mutinies require leadership that is willing to listen and respond, which is more likely under a democratic regime than an authoritarian one. Although it may be hard to convince leaders that they should be flattered by mutinying soldiers, mutinies do in some ways represent a level of faith in leadership to adequately address grievances. When soldiers have no faith that a leader will respond or the political system is so fragmented that there is no one to hear the complaints (such as during the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia) mutinies become a pointless endeavour. As earlier noted, soldiers may also see an opportunity to gain leverage through a mutiny in situations in which political leadership has been under threat by civilian unrest.

However it is not only the perceptions that democratic leaders are more responsive that may make soldiers in democratic countries more prone to mutinies; the civil liberties often associated with democratic political systems work to the advantage of mutineers. Increased freedoms of media in particular provide soldiers, as well as civilians, with new tools to express their grievances. The media in Africa in the 1970s and into the 1980s was often state-controlled with ‘people being spoken to, not listened to.’^{lxxiii} However, this began to change in the 1990s as one country after another introduced legislation that gave local press the freedoms it lacked in previous decades. The increased media freedoms were partially a result of the democratization movement but were also used to further pressure political reform. The new freedoms of media allowed reporters (however not without risk) to ‘reveal what [was] going on behind the well draped windows of public institutions.’^{lxxiv} There was increased public scrutiny of political figures and government procedures, with growing attention towards corruption. While not all states have progressed in an equal fashion towards increased media freedoms, generally speaking there have been more privatized media and more access to international media from the 1990s onward than in previous decades. The increased privatization of media sources as well as introduction of new forms of media has resulted in more interactive media, allowing messages to move ‘downwards, upwards, and sideways.’^{lxxv}

From the 1990s onward the media became a more popular tool for mutineers, with increased use of radio announcements and media interviews. These tactics serve as a way for mutineers to work around the chain of command and in some cases to connect with the international community and the civilian population. In recent years there is a growing trend of soldiers utilizing the media to publicly express their grievances in hopes that a threat of revolt will be enough to resolve their complaints. For example, Nigerian soldiers contacted the media to threaten their leaders with a mutiny in 2012 while Sierra Leonean soldiers and Malians soldiers suggested similar to the media in their respective countries in 2013.^{lxxvi}

Conclusion

An examination of mutinies across time has shown that they most often occur in states with some respect for political freedoms and civil liberties, a pattern that was

particularly apparent with the increase of revolts in the 1990s. Soldiers likely view democratic leaders as more responsive and they often utilize the political freedoms and civil liberties that are associated with democracies to their advantage during mutinies.

This article has shown that mutinies in the 1990s can be seen as a way to gauge the impact international economic and political changes had on rank and file soldiers and also demonstrates a way they responded to the effects. It has proposed that soldiers in the 1990s were not immune to the political currents of the time, even if they were regularly seen as suppressing the movement. Issues that were prominent in the civilian sector, such as awareness of corruption and demands for accountability, were also key themes in mutinies. Just as ‘ordinary citizens’ in the 1990s began to ‘exert a high degree of control over leaders,’^{lxxvii} so did rank and file soldiers through increased mutinies. Mutineers in the 1990s also used similar rhetoric and tactics as those in the civilian sector who were pushing for democratic reform.

The attitude of the military towards the democratization movement is not one of complete support or disregard, but rather a more nuanced relationship. Hutchful may be correct in his assessment that the democracy movement ‘lost the battle for the military,’^{lxxviii} however I have suggested that the movement was not lost on the rank and file soldiers. Mutineers adopted and adapted aspects of popular political themes of the time to articulate their grievances and improve their conditions. The use of political rhetoric within African militaries has been a trend since early independence years. However, most analysis has focused on the political ideology of the officers who came to power in coups. This article has shed light on ways the rank and file interpret popular political messages. Although soldiers are often distinguished from civilians through uniforms, regulations, and lifestyle restrictions, this analysis has demonstrated that the division is not absolute. Through the lens of mutiny we can see the ways that junior soldiers are both a part of larger society and influenced by political culture within the public sphere.

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ⁱ Callahan, 'The Indian Army, Total War and the Dog that Didn't Bark in the Night,' 119.

ⁱⁱ Research for this article is drawn from Dwyer, 'Anticipating the Revolt: Trends in Military Mutinies in West and Central Africa, 1960-2012.'

ⁱⁱⁱ Examples of volumes dedicated to the topic include Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner, eds. *Democratization in Africa: Progress and Retreat*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010) and Abdul Raufu Mustapha and Lindsay Whitfield, eds. *Turning Points in African Democracy* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2009).

^{iv} Hutchful, 'Military Issues in the Transition to Democracy,' 608.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Nugent, *Africa Since Independence*, 2nd Ed., 377.

^{vii} Decalo 'The Morphology of Radical Military Rule in Africa,' 122-144.

^{viii} Nugent, *Africa Since Independence*, 2nd Ed., 246.

^{ix} Dwyer, 'Anticipating the Revolt: Trends in Military Mutinies in West and Central Africa, 1960-2012'

^x Difficulty in labelling acts of military indiscipline can be seen in the variations of lists of coups, coup attempts, coup plots, and other armed conflicts. This topic is examined in more detail in Jonathan M. Powell and Clayton L. Thyne, 'Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset,' 249-259.

^{xi} Of the 66 cases examined, there are 8 cases that also occur in coup/failed coup datasets by Patrick McGowan and Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne.

^{xii} Field research was conducted in 2011 and 2012.

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- ^{xiii} For the sake of comparing mutinies by decades this graphic shows mutinies up to 2009; however, the full project includes mutinies up to 2012. There were six mutinies between 2010-2012, which are included in the article analysis but not included in this graphic.
- ^{xiv} Nugent, *Africa Since Independence*, 2nd Ed., 330-331.
- ^{xv} Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival*, 170.
- ^{xvi} Omotoogun, *Budgeting for the Military Sector in Africa: The Processes and Mechanism of Control*, 1.
- ^{xvii} Van De Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999*, 64-112.
- ^{xviii} For full dataset see <http://www.sipri.org/>. All figures are set to USD 2011 exchange rate.
- ^{xix} Harris, 'The Case for Demilitarisation in sub-Saharan Africa,' 3.
- ^{xx} Ibid., 4.
- ^{xxi} Herbst, 'African Militaries and Rebellion: The Political Economy of Threat and Combat Research,' 359.
- ^{xxii} Bratton and Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, 244.
- ^{xxiii} Allen, 'Understanding African Politics,' 312.
- ^{xxiv} Bratton, 'International versus Domestic Pressures for Democratisation in Africa,' 160.
- ^{xxv} Thom, 'An Assessment of Prospects for Ending Domestic Military Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa,' 3; Howe, *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States*, 80.
- ^{xxvi} Luckham, 'Taming the Monster: Democratisation and Demilitarisation,' 589.
- ^{xxvii} Dwyer, 'Peacekeeping Abroad, Trouble Marking at Home: Mutinies in West Africa.'
- ^{xxviii} Bratton, 'International versus Domestic Pressures for Democratisation in Africa,' 179.
- ^{xxix} Howe, *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States*, 78.
- ^{xxx} Bratton, 'International versus Domestic Pressures for Democratisation in Africa,' 165.
- ^{xxxi} *West Africa*, 28 May-3 June, 1990, 877.
- ^{xxxii} Wiseman, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 3.
- ^{xxxiii} Bratton, 'International versus Domestic Pressures for Democratisation in Africa,' 184; Allen, 'Understanding African Politics,' 313.
- ^{xxxiv} Wiseman, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 5.
- ^{xxxv} Bratton and Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, 3.
- ^{xxxvi} Wiseman, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 5.
- ^{xxxvii} Allen, et. al. 'Editorial: Surviving Democracy?' 8.
- ^{xxxviii} Wiseman, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 5.
- ^{xxxix} Bratton and Mattes, 'Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?' 2.
- ^{xl} For more on class relations within the military see Jimmy Kandeh, 'Coups from Below: Armed Subalterns and State Power in West Africa.'
- ^{xli} Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, 3.
- ^{xlii} Bratton and Mattes, 'Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?' 3.

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- xliv Widner, 'The 1990 Elections in Côte d'Ivoire,' 31-41.
- xliv Ibid.
- xlvi Ibid., 32.
- xlvi Crook, 'Côte d'Ivoire: Multi-party democracy and political change: surviving the crisis,' 16.
- xlvi Crook, 'Côte d'Ivoire: Multi-party democracy and political change: surviving the crisis,' 16; *West Africa*, June 18-24, 1022.
- xlvi *West Africa*, May 28, 1990, 877-878; *Africa Research Bulletin*, June 1990, 9693.
- xlvi *West Africa*, May 28, 1990, 877-878; *West Africa*, June 25, 1990, 1090; *Africa Research Bulletin*, June 1990, 9693.
- ¹ *West Africa*, 28 May-3 June, 877.
- li Wiseman, 'Military rule in The Gambia: an interim assessment,' 917
- lii Wiseman and Vidler, 'The July 1994 coup d'état in the Gambia: The end of an era,' 57.
- liii Author interview with Dr. Abdoulaye Saine, June 2012.
- liv *Africa Research Bulletin*, August 1998, 13226.
- lv *West Africa*, April 29-May 5, 1996; 667.
- lvi *West Africa*, April 29-May 5, 1996; 667.
- lvii *Africa Research Bulletin*, August 1998, 13226.
- lviii *Associated Press*, 'Soldiers End Burkina Faso Mutiny,' July 16, 1999.
- lix Hutchful, 'Military Issues in the Transition to Democracy,' 608.
- lx Bratton and Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa*, 244.
- lxi Hutchful, 'Military Issues in the Transition to Democracy,' 609.
- lxii Ibid.
- lxiii Ibid.
- lxiv Rose, 'The Anatomy of Mutiny,' 568.
- lxv Wiseman, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 5; Nugent, *Africa Since Independence*, 2nd ed. 382.
- lxvi Nugent, *Africa Since Independence*, 2nd ed. 389-392.
- lxvii Ibid., 389.
- lxviii Freedom House's 'Freedoms of the World index' has been produced annually since 1973. It calculates scores for political rights and civil liberties and classifies countries into one of three categories: Free, Partially Free, or Not Free. In order to correspond to Freedom House's data, for this part of the analysis I examined mutinies starting in 1973 (although the wider project includes mutinies from 1960-2012). This involved a total of fifty-three incidents of mutiny.
- lxix Eleven interviews were conducted with current and former Gambian military personnel, both within The Gambia and with members of the Diaspora community.
- lxx 'Gambia executions: Senegal Angry After Nationals Killed,' *BBC*, August 29, 2012.
- lxxi Twenty-one interviews were conducted with current and former soldiers in Sierra Leone.

^{lxxii} Author interview with Sierra Leonean junior soldier, May 2012.

^{lxxiii} Hyden and Leslie, 'Communications and Democratization in Africa,' 4.

^{lxxiv} *Ibid.*, 12.

^{lxxv} *Ibid.*, 5.

^{lxxvi} *Le Républicain* published the letter on their website <http://www.lerepublicain-mali.com/?q=node/225>.

Translation and analysis by Bruce Whitehouse from his blog entry on March 6, 2013 titled 'The north, the army, and the junta,' <http://bridgesfrombamako.com/2013/03/06/north-army-junt/>; Kadir Badsha Mukhtar and Misbahu Bashir, 'Nigeria: Darfur Operations-Nigerian Soldiers Threaten Mutiny- Ask to be Airlifted Home,' *Daily Trust*, June 26 2012; *Africa Review*, 'Pay scandal rocks Sierra Leone's troops in Somalia,' October 17, 2013.

^{lxxvii} Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory: Expanded Edition*, 3.

^{lxxviii} Hutchful, 'Military Issues in the Transition to Democracy,' 608.